

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

SHMUEL ASHKENASI, *Violinist*

ANTON KUERTI, *Pianist*

Thursday, March 23rd, 1967

8:30 p.m.

Programme

SONATA IN G MAJOR, KOECHEL 379

Mozart

Adagio - Allegro
Andantino cantabile

From the solo-violin sonata with figured-bass accompaniment, the 18th century shows us three sharp shifts of style: to the two-line contrapuntal equality of a violin part and written-out right- and left-hand harpsichord parts; then, paralleling the ascendancy of that new toy the piano, to a solo-piano sonata *with violin accompaniment*, a texture that might have seemed less curious given the smaller tone of 18th-century pianos compared to our own concert grands; and finally to a new kind of *concertante* (or give-and-take) equality between the two partners. In the historic move towards this last stage, Mozart's mature violin sonatas (the last dozen-and-a-half, say, of his forty-odd works in this form) are prime models. Yet curiously he seems to have been unconscious of their newness of approach — still referring to this particular work in the older manner in a letter to his father of April 1781:

Today . . . we had a concert where three of my compositions were performed — new ones, of course; a rondo for a concerto for [the violinist Gaetano] Brunetti; a sonata with violin accompaniment for myself, which I composed last night between eleven and twelve (but in order to be able to finish it, I only wrote out the accompaniment for Brunetti and retained my own part in my head); and then a rondo for [the singer Francesco] Ceccarelli, which he had to repeat.

The letter also gives valued insight into the superhuman fluency of Mozart's invention. Though the composer is still content to classify the piece in the older way, a reviewer in 1783 in the *Magazin der Musik*, Hamburg, recognized the novelty of the published set of six sonatas (of which ours is the fifth):

. . . the only ones of this kind. Rich in new ideas and in evidences of the great musical genius of their author. Very brilliant and suited to the instrument. At the same time the accompaniment of the violin is so artfully combined with the clavier part that both instruments are kept constantly on the alert; so that these sonatas require just as skillful a player on the violin as on the clavier.

This was, A. Hyatt King remarks, "a much more favorable judgment than [Mozart's] later chamber works were to receive."

The G major Sonata is unlike the others of its set, but similar to many of the earlier Mozart sonatas, in one respect: its sequence of only two movements. This was the format Mozart in earlier days had copied from the sonatas of one of his principal influences, Johann Christian Bach. The sonata's piano part, in its eventual written-down form, is, especially in the broad Adagio introduction full of a sonorous richness rarely found even in the composer's sonatas for piano alone. The Allegro unexpectedly, but enchantingly, turns to the tonic minor key. The companion movement is a theme (based on an opening harmonic sequence reminiscent of the Adagio opening) followed by five variations and a coda. Variation 1 is for piano alone; Variation 4 dips again into the pathetic straits of G minor; Variation 5, conventionally but with real delicacy of expression, slows the tempo down to Adagio; the coda resumes the original speed.

SONATA NO. 1 IN A MINOR, OP. 105

Schumann

Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck
Allegretto
Lebhaft

The two Schumann violin sonatas are dated 1851, which makes them "late" Schumann, and, by critical implication, part of this composer's creative "decline." Yet the A minor Sonata is full of the ardor of his romantic young-period pieces. The theme of the first movement (the German marking means "with passionate feeling") has a genuine urgency to it, however sprawling its working-out may tend to be. The finale reveals a splendid sort of perpetual-

motion exchange of rapid figures between the two instruments, a well-taken rhythmic contrast in its middle section, and a pertinent recollection of the first movement's "passion" just before the end. And if the central Allegretto is to be charged with repetitiousness (such is the general charge of Alfred Einstein, for example, against all the later Schumann chamber works), then it is the same characteristic found in such favorite short piano lyrics of the composer as *Träumerei* or in the earlier songs of the *Dichterliebe* cycle: a characteristic that suggests not straight repetition so much as a series of fond recurrences each skillfully leading into a different harmonic channel. If the movement does not quite achieve the lyrical equilibrium of its parallel in the Piano Concerto, it is patently from the same studio, the same set of ears, the same tender imagination.

- INTERMISSION -

SONATA

Debussy

Allegro vivo

Intermède: Fantasque et léger

Finale: Très animé

This was Debussy's last completed composition. It was one of a projected series of six sonatas for different instrumental combinations he planned as a homage to the spirit of French classicism in music — the spirit of Lalande, Couperin, Rameau. The original title-page, in the style of an 18th-century engraved printing-plate, refers to these works as "Six Sonatas / for various instruments / composed by / Claude Debussy / French musician." Tragically, only three of the six were finished. On the manuscript of No. 3 — the present work — the cancer-stricken composer noted that the fourth would call for oboe, horn, and harpsichord. Debussy wrote sardonically to a friend that the Violin Sonata was written "only to get rid of it. . . . [It] is interesting from a documentary point of view, as an example of what a sick man can write during a war." The composer played the piano part with Gaston Poulet (later well-known as a conductor) on violin, at the first performance of the Sonata in May 1917. It was his last performance in public; he died ten months later.

The Violin Sonata describes a gradual speeding-up of remarkably varied rhythmic ideas — the rhythmic detail of the first movement has its parallel in certain passages of Debussy's last orchestral score, the ballet *Jeux*. In its notation (short bars of long-held sounds), it achieves a special freedom, what one might call a regularized irregularity of metre. The closing phrases introduce a Spanish scalic element that receives its fulfillment in the guitar-like rhythms and splashing colors of the finale. In Debussy's words, the theme of the finale "is subjected to the most curious deformations and ultimately leaves the impression of an idea turning back upon itself, like a snake biting its own tail." This theme starts with a reminiscence of the first movement, as if to make unity and connections clear.

Evaluation of the late Debussy works — *Jeux*, the piano Etudes, the three Sonatas — has altered radically in recent times: witness the following, from the preface to a revised edition of Edward Lockspeiser's *Debussy*:

I have been impelled . . . drastically to revise my earlier portrait of Debussy as the hedonist of composers, the creator of a sensuous art magnificent in its isolation, but unable to bear the tension of his life and eventually disintegrating behind a screen of bristling irony. Time brings a sense of wholeness, and while I may still hope to celebrate the aesthetic of pleasure and gratification which Debussy so gloriously revived in French music, the remote other-worldliness of his later works, far from marking a decline, are, as I am able to see them now, the creations of a hedonist who had become a stoic.

RONDEAU BRILLANT IN B MINOR, DEUTSCH 895

Schubert

Andante - Allegro

The manuscript of this work is headed simply "Rondo" and is signed and dated: "Oct. 1826, Frz. Schubert." In the early part of 1827 it was performed at the concert-rooms of the Vienna publishers Artaria and Co. The young Bohemian-born violinist Josef Slawjk, for whom both this and the Fantasia of 1828 may have been conceived, was partnered by the pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet. The work was published by Artaria in April, 1827, with a fancier (and fashionably frenchified) title and with the opus-number 70. In due course (June, 1828) a reviewer of the *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst* noted the publication with a bland expression of critical favor:

The grandiose talent of the renowned song and romance composer is many-sided and tries itself in every branch. . . . The work under notice shows a bold master of harmony. . . . A fiery imagination animates this piece and draws the player to the depths and heights of harmony, borne now by a mighty hurricane, now by gentle waves.

Although the whole is brilliant, it is not indebted for its existence to mere frustrations, such as grin at us in thousandfold contortions from many a composition and fatigue the soul. . . . Both the pianoforte and the fiddle require a practised artist, who must be prepared for passages which have not by any means attained to their right of citizenship by endless use, but betoken a succession of new and inspired ideas. The player will feel attracted in an interesting way by a beautiful harmonic interchange.

(In the same issue, the reviewer also bestows a nosegay or two on the *Winterreise* song-cycle.)

Notes — John Beckwith

S. HUOK PRESENTS

SHMUEL ASHKENASI